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ABSTRACT

Although women's roles in America had previously been confined to home and family, women in the 1960's began to look for professional fulfillment outside the home. A recent survey of 300 midlife Boston women reveals that women who are married, have children, and are in prestigious positions have the greatest sense of well-being. The women's movement has given rise to a reexamination of sex roles, with the result that men too are beginning to question stereotypical definitions of male and female behavior. Women's studies centers such as those at Harvard's Bunting Institute, which have become increasingly common, signal a new and promising emphasis on the development of women's potentials. Such an emphasis should continue to be developed for the sake of both sexes. (JBM)

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CROSSING PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES: HUMAN ISSUES

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Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Catholic Educational Association, Washington, D.C., April 4-7, 1983).

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Crossing Professional Boundaries: Human Issues

When asked to prepare this paper for such a prestigious association as NCEA, I toyed with the idea of focusing on women's issues but eventually felt that would imply that crossing professional boundaries is a concern of only half the population. Besides, cliches' such as "the Catholic vote," "Black viewpoint," "students' rights," and yes, "women's issues" have always annoyed me a bit because they usually appear out of context and conjure up negative sterotypes. Hopes, aspirations, career choices, and decision making occur in the lives of both men and women. One of the purposes of this paper is to demonstrate a common denominator of choice in the lives of both men and women while at the same time noting the differences because of societal forces.

Some months ago, an article in the Boston Globe[1] caught my fancy. It was written by a Nancy Bauer who covered an informal meeting of about fifty women state legislators who chose a spot in the Poconos to chat and exchange ideas. One woman asked whether the others felt women were different legislators from men. What surfaced was that while women

[1] The Boston Globe, June 20, 1982

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legislators increased in number from 344 in 1972 to the current 908, the only differences between the men and women appeared to be in rosters of concerns. It became apparent that every issue was a human issue.

The women legislators did not look upon themselves as different from their male counterparts. They did indicate, however, that they appreciated the strong network of women in politics and felt that because of such a strong system, public confidence in women politicians had increased. Such a network can boast of women who are well-versed and whose interests span a continuum of human issues.

Although eight generations ago it would have been impossible to even imagine a woman legislator in our country, history notes that women have always worked from the time they made food and clothing at home to be sold. To see women in the labor force is not a new scene. In most history books there is the allusion to women canning, sewing, or taking in wash and working on farms. In most instances their input was seen as useful or utilitarian in that it supplemented family income. Man was the breadwinner; woman was the helpmate.

In addition to contributing to the economy of the country, women have always been strong advocates for human rights. In the 1830's they worked diligently for the abolition of slavery and less than a century later were demanding the right to vote. It always amused me to go through the family pictures at home and see one of my grandmothers and five other women dressed in long skirts and voluminous hats holding up a large slogan which read "if we don't vote, we don't cook." Not too imaginative a poster by today's standards, but it certainly helped to get the message across. It was difficult for me to picture this tender, feminine, soft-spoken grandma who lived with us and whom I loved dearly, being such a vocal outspoken person. As I grew older I realized that to be an advocate for human rights one does not have to be a card-carrying feminist.

During the last few decades which were punctuated by the Civil Rights movement, Vietnam war, protests of numerous kinds, and countless other historical events, the status of women has been affected more than that of men. From the earliest days in this country, limitations have been

placed on women because of the way society perceived the biological role of women and its militating against a career or involvement in social action issues. This, compounded by the fact that women lacked skills, created an external barrier to joining men in the world of work.

The mid-sixties showed that more women freshmen than every before were enrolled in colleges throughout the country. These students were serious about their education and were beginning to voice their objection to choosing between a career and marriage. They were out to achieve a many faceted role. The earlier "feminine mystique" was giving way to a women's movement. A movement which provided the opportunity for women not to appear as a deviant group or a collection of misfits, but to be seen as a committed group willing to change a traditional role and ignore the limitations set by society in its many years of stereotyping the sex-role of women.

There were, and still are, a great many concerns with which women must wrestle. Despite the fact that the feminist movement raised the consciousness of men and women on the role of women in society, the

movement did not do much to change life styles of women. While a few doors were opening to satisfy a variety of women's choices in the sixties, the dilemnas faced by women differed from those of men because women have always been faced with choosing a life style and not just a career. Where men appear to have a single choice to make, women have three major considerations: professional world, family and themselves. Being housewives and mothers is very important, but for many women there is room for something else. And if that something else is important to women, they are demonstrating that their life-styles can accommodate it without undue stress or negligence of other sub-roles.

Three middle-aged women authors have just completed a survey of some three-hundred mid-life Boston women. The results of the study appear in a new book entitled "Lifeprints: New Patterns of Love and Work for Today's Women."[1] A brief review of the work was summarized in the Sunday paper recently. Among the findings, the following were highlighted: 1) doing and achieving are just as important as relationships; two major components of well-being are mastery (the feeling of importance with a

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[1] Linda Matcham, The Boston Globe (February 8, 1983, p. 11 in "Living" citing Rosalind Barnett, Caryl Rivers, and Grace Baruch, Lifeprints: New Patterns of Love and Work for Today's Women (National Science Foundation, 1982.)

positive sense of self-esteem), and pleasure (the ability to find life enjoyable). Mastery was equated with "doing," while pleasure related to the affective domain - the quality of one's relationship with another, 2) Those in the study with the highest sense of mastery and pleasure in their lives were married, had children and were in prestigious positions. It appears that women's involvement in many roles strengthens the sense of well-being.

Women work for many reasons. Because of today's economy, we see families where both husband and wife must work. In addition to generating a substantial family income these days, women are working to satisfy psychological needs. Because they are better educated today than they were a few generations ago, women are equipped to enter varied careers and professions. Their education is being questioned by themselves, on another front, however; they are asking why there is an absence of women's recorded achievements in history.

If we really believe that our educational apostolate requires that we educate the whole person to his or her full human potential, then we

are obligated to assist women in particular to find their own way, set goals and define the future by offering a purpose. There must be a way through the curriculum to incorporate women's studies.

I am getting a little ahead of myself here. Before I address ways to cross professional barriers or boundaries, I would like to spend a few more minutes on the barriers themselves.

Our upbringing has fostered dependence in little girls and independence in little boys. Even Piaget hinted at this in his writings during the thirties, especially in his famous work, "The Moral Judgment of the Child."

An unconscious learning of sex roles begins almost at birth. This progressive socialization process can limit aspirations, form attitudes and set preferences. I have taught long enough to remember when bright young women in my classes chose not to achieve higher scores than young men for fear of losing out socially or being looked upon as masculine in behavior. The women's movement fostered a climate which gave support to women achieving goals without posing threats to their feminity. They

began to see that cooperation does away with undue competition. This is not to say that healthy cooperation and competition are mutually exclusive.

There is a great deal of focus on women and careers today. Much is statistical in nature dealing with pay scales and number of women in specific professions. While these are important topics, they are not within the purview of this paper. My concern is with socialization variables that can enhance or hold back today's women.

I find young men in college supportive of women who are career-oriented. In fact they are among the men who, faced with a new career or a career change themselves, take the career of their spouses into consideration before making a move. This is a far cry from the days when women were faced with marriage or a career, or the days when married women had to terminate their college education to take their rightful place in society.

The establishment of one's self-identity is important. Up until a few decades ago women were more or less expected to identify themselves

through the lives of others. Their fulfillment came through accomplishments of a husband or a child. Writings of Freud, Erickson, Bettleheim and McClelland reflect the fact that women are tied to human relationships as bases for their identity.

Being Mrs. Jones is a fulfilling role, as is that of being the mother of Billy Jones, but Mrs. Jones is also a person in her own right. Perhaps the women's movement helped both men and women to define who they really are, as opposed to what they are equipped to do. As part of women's seeking identity of their own, it is quite common today for women to use their maiden names in the professional world. Another sign of the times is the increase in the use of hyphenated last names. One major result of the feminist movement is that of shared roles for men who are finding satisfaction in the pleasure of making a home and caring for children. This is contrary to the connotations which eminate from the old cliches' of "women's work" or "men's work."

There is still a prevailing attitude about a career woman being a cold, masculine individual. Stereotypes will fade away as we forget to

categorize men and women and think of them in terms of human persons. Carol Gilligan at Harvard is making great contributions towards an integrated theory of morality. Her focus is on humanity in general.

We have enumerated but a few basic intrinsic and extrinsic boundaries which are not crossed by protests or noise alone. We could carry placards or even sing along with Helen Reddy the words to "I am Woman," from now until dooms day, and while the exercises might be fun and people would take notice, the first order of business is an earnest study of how and why the minority status of women has lasted so long. Such a study would have implications for women everywhere: business, industry, the military and the Church.

The concept of women's studies is being endorsed daily. It was mentioned earlier that women are conscious of the lack of historical accounts of their contributions to the arts, sciences and professions. As a result they wonder how specific fields relate to them. Institutions of learning are responding with women's studies. The latter exist in many forms: departments, resource centers or research units and

individual courses. University catalogs are noting the offerings of seminar series on women and summer programs in women's contributions over time. Surrounding each effort is a supporting network which provides a sounding board as well as a vehicle for women to form contacts with other women in various fields of interest.

The Standford Center, now in its 8th year has certainly demonstrated that women's studies is not a fad or a mere trend. Standford, just to cite an example, has concentrated on the restoration of women writers, artists and other intellectuals. Accompanying all this is constant re-evaluation of such achievements.

Other examples of Institutes or Centers not just concerned with equity, but also with truth, are the Bunting Institute at Harvard; and the Center for American Women and Politics, which is a unit of the Eagleton

Institute at Rutgers.

Right here in Washington, D.C., in 1972, The Center for Women Policy Studies was established. The Center is perhaps best known for work in women and credit and also for policy action research concerned with women in the criminal justice system.

In the April '82 issue of Change, there is a complete list of Women's Studies Research Centers on campuses across the country.

Where women in the past found themselves merely adapting to change, today's women are causing changes to be made. To do so, these young future professionals or entrepeneurs need visible role models to emulate. It is important for women students to see women faculty members or administrators, lay and religious, who demonstrate many-faceted life styles which are satisfying and challenging. Such role models give courage and

impetus to young women to come to grips with their identity. Women's studies benefit both sexes. Men are just as interested as women in studying and analyzing tradition. Men are beginning to delve courageously into women's issues for their dissertation research. This past year I had the privilege of serving on a dissertation board for such a student. Rev. James Power just defended his dissertation on "Psycho-socialization: World War II Through 1982." Father's research tended to contrast male and female processes of development. His foremost intent was to facilitate an expanded awareness of human psychosocial developmental possibilities by pinpointing the need for a reconstruction of a more solid human theory of psychosocial development.[1]

A male colleague of mine, Dr. Pierre Lambert, will deliver a paper at Iowa State University later this month at the annual meeting of the

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[1] Rev. James Power, "Psychosocialization: World War II Through 1982" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Education, Boston College, 1983.)

Society for Educational Biography. His topic is "Women in Education: The Known, The Forgotten, and The Unknown."

Women are not seeking anything but equal treatment under the law. They are well aware, however, that just because something is legal does not automatically guarantee implementation. Where real freedom abounds, people do not have to fight for rights; they are guaranteed.

If we accept the assumption that one's search for meaning in life is a natural motivational force, then we accept the right of both men and women to find meaning in life-styles of their choice. Without respect, recognition of such rights is meaningless.

The words of Teilhard de Chardin summarize what it might be like when women are truly accepted for what they are. "One day," he envisioned,

"after we have harnessed the air, the winds, the seas and gravitation itself, we will seize for God the energies of love. And man, for the second time in the history of the world, will have discovered fire."[1]

As educators, faced with choices and challenges, as the theme of this convention highlights, we should be able to provide the environment and help to generate experiences in which women will offer the spark that can create that fire.

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[1] J. M. Mortier, Avec Teilhard de Chardin "Vues Ardentes." (Editions de Seuil, 1967, p. 99) from an address of Father General Pedro Arrupe, S.J., to the Presidents and Board Chairpersons of AJCU Institutions, St. Peter's College, November 11, 1972.

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